The Morning Albertan,

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THEATRES OF ALBERTA.

There is an erroneous impression in the large centres in the East that one of the chief drawbacks in the Prairie Provinces is the lack of amusements, more especially in the theatrical line. It seems to themincredible that a first-class company can make the long jumps over the country of magnificient distances, much less play to good business at the stopping points. This impression, which is the origin of much kindly but misplaced sympathy, is due, like all the false impressions held by the people of the East, not to any lack of good-will, but to lack of information. It is quite true that Calgary, and for that matter Alberta, presents a theatrical situation fraught with difficulties that would seem excewsive to managers and stars, to say nothing of the great uninitiated, insurmountable.

But the West has a way of getting over difficulties, and around obstacles, and meeting conditions that the East does not understand because it has never encountered them.

As illustrating the difficulties met with by the Western Canada Booking Bureau it may be noted that special arrangements must often be made in order that high-class attractions may be presented to Western patrons. The visit of Mrs. Fiske for instance was only secured on the Bureau guaranteeing her $1,000 a night for six nights. This fact

is recorded simply to show two things, first, that the managers will not stop at trifles and in the second place that Western people know and appreciate high-class talent and are prepared to pay for it.

The moving spirit in matters thespian in Alberta in general and in Calgary in particular is Mr. E. Willis, lesee of the Lyric theatre in this city. Mr. Willis, who, by the way, is an Australian, having been born in the city of Melbourne, took over the Lyric on June 5, 1906. He at once became actively interested in the establishment of a Booking Bureau and in October of that year the first meeting of the Western Canada Booking Bureau was held in Calgary. Mr. Willis, who originated the idea of the Bureau, had in the interim between June and October visited the different towns and explained to those interested the advantages of booking all attractions under one head, thereby facilitiating the work both of the companies and the managers. He succeeded in interesting Lethbridge, Cardston, Taber, Medicine Hat (the opera house at which place Mr. Willis has lately leased), Edmonton, and in fact all the towns on the C. and E. line north of Calgary, and all towns in British Columbia west as far as Kamloops, and all on the Crow's Nest and on the main line as far east as Portage la Prairie.

These towns form the Western Theatrical Circuit, and the company of which Mr. Willis is the head, has leased, besides the Lyric, the Edmonton Opera House, the House at Medicine Hat and at Nelson, B.C.

Attractions are secured from independent sources, as the Bureau is not affiliated with any specific circut, but will book from any circuit or any independent attraction.

Since its inception the Bureau has brought through and financed under its direct efforts such high-class attractios as Mrs. Fiske. "We Are King," "Bonnie Brier Bush," "The Great McEwan," Geo. B. Howard Col, The Beggar Prince Opera Co., Robert Ganthony, the Celebrated English Entertainer, and closed a contract with Clay Clement. It is significant that while Calgary may be thought out of the way and geographically difficult to supply, it is faring better than many of the houses on the main circuit and has only been dark three nights since June last, and Mr. Willis takes a pardonable pride in his belief that he has kept the average of the attractions presented under his management up to a grade that has commanded the appreciation of the theatre-going public.

It is true that the inadequate houses at points where with better facilities good business could be played to, such as Regina, Brandon, Moose Jaw and others that might be mentioned militates against the better work of the circuit. The conditions, however, are improving and with the increase of the population in another year or two will come a vast change for the better in theatrical conditions in the Northwest circuit.

Mr. Willis has all but closed a contract with the San Francisco Opera Company, freely conceded as one of the best

on this side of the water, with its justly celebrated Daphne Pollard connection, to buy outright and present for ten nights during the Dominion Fair. Mr. Willis desires to present something during that fair time so meritorious that people will be able to return East and say they saw one of the best attractions on the continent at Calgary.

THEATRES OF ALBERTA

ERNEST WILLIS
Most Prominent Theatrical Manager in Alberta.